
This is a reproduction of a library book that was digitized by Google as part of an ongoing effort to preserve the information in books and make it universally accessible.

Google™ books

<https://books.google.com>



1861 6.

C H E A P

T E L E G R A P H S ;

OR,

T E L E G R A M S

FOR THE

MILLION.

LONDON:
PRINTED BY JOHN KING & COMPANY, 63, QUEEN STREET, E.C.

TELEGRAMS FOR THE MILLION.

Few things have tended more to the development of the trade and commerce of this country, than the Electric Telegraph. Following in the wake of rapid locomotion, came still more rapid communication ; a new era was commenced, and which has progressed with such rapidity that, in the comparatively short space of fifteen years, this country has become covered with a vast network of Telegraph wires. We have wires suspended in the air, wires buried in the earth, wires submerged in the sea ; the 60,000 messages which were transmitted in 1850, have increased in 1860 to 1,300,000, for which £275,000 was paid by the public ; and still the use of the Telegraph is confined to the few who can afford to pay the high rate of charges, while the great mass of the public look upon it as a sort of luxury, only to be used upon some sudden emergency, and a large proportion of whom have never used the Telegraph in their lives ; and if these 1,300,000 messages could be dissected, it would be found that more than three-fourths of them came entirely from large merchants and brokers, and even these are compelled by the high rate of charges, to limit the number of their messages far below what they would send if the charges were more reasonable.

It is no secret that to make any matter pay, it must be made popular, and to make it popular, cheapness is a most important element, and not cheapness alone, but uniformity of charge. In these days of competition, no man can afford to pay more for an article than it is worth, and consequently the use of the Telegraph is confined to those whose business is so extensive as to allow of a sufficient margin for Telegrams. The old Postal system was perfectly analogous; in 1839, when the rate of postage was not only comparatively high, but irregular in amount, the number of letters posted in that year amounted to 80,000,000, and the Post-Office was a positive loss and burthen to the revenue of the country; but a reduction and uniform charge of one penny took place, and in the year 1859 the number of letters passed through the Post-Offices in this country had increased to the enormous amount of 523,000,000; and instead of it resulting in irregularity in the dispatch and delivery of the letters, and immense loss to the revenue as predicted, we have greater regularity than ever; what was before a positive loss, yields a large clear revenue to the National Exchequer, and it is now admitted no greater boon could have been conferred on the public than the Penny Postage. This principle is not confined to the postal system, it is the same in every thing; reduce the duty on any one article and the increased consumption more than compensates the revenue for the reduction; reduce the fare on steamboats, or railways, or run excursion trains, and the consequence is an immense increase in the number of travellers, many of whom very rarely, if ever, travel at all. And the very same principle applies in a far greater degree to the Telegraph; reduce the cost of Telegraph messages to a low, and uniform rate, and it would soon become

familiarized to the public, and be as extensively used as the post-office. Every one can remember in his own case, numberless instances, when if he could have transmitted a Telegraph message for one shilling, irrespective of distance, he would gladly have availed himself of it, and no doubt by so doing would have paid eventually ten times as much in Telegrams as he has done at present, and as by means of a low and uniform rate of charge the use of Telegraphs became general, so would it be extensive—the more it is used, the more will it be used. And such is the force of habit, that having been once begun, it will make itself an absolute necessity. In fact, the immense benefits that would accrue to the public, from a low uniform rate of charge are so self evident, that it is almost a waste of time to expatiate upon it. The real question is, Can it be done so as to pay those who carry it out a fair rate of interest for their outlay? and the question may very fairly be asked, if it is feasible, why do the other companies not carry it out?

Unfortunately for the public, the Telegraph system was founded in pretty much the same manner as the railway system, enormous sums paid for patent rights, one company paying as much as £200,000 for this species of property alone; enormous sums of money expended in laying wires covered with gutta-percha underground, and as this material suddenly decayed, it was afterwards discovered this money would have been quite as profitably employed, if sunk in the Dead Sea; and this was not all, independent of natural causes, human causes were not wanted, every engineer had a sort of a mania for his own system of insulation, and as every engineer that came into a Company, condemned the mode of insulation used by his predecessor, and reinsulated the lines

with his own system, which in its turn, soon came to grief, either by himself or successor, very large sums of money were sunk in this manner; one fact of this description is notorious: the lines of the Company being reinsulated at a cost of £60,000, which after being up for 12 months, were taken down, buried, and replaced at a further enormous cost; and if ever the anticipated New Zealander, should, after sketching the ruins of St. Paul's from London Bridge, proceed to excavate some portions of the ruins of London, the immense number of insulations of every shape, form, and size, which will be brought to light, will rather puzzle that specimen of a future age to account for; but this was not all: submarine cables were considered necessary, and as submarine cables are of all things the most expensive and precarious, it will not be astonishing to hear that £200,000 of one Telegraph Company's Capital is represented by a quantity of old iron wire, hemp, gutta-percha, and copper wire, lying useless at the bottom of the sea; not worth the trouble, and will not pay for the expense of taking up, even if that were possible. And therefore when the present Telegraph Companies state that they cannot afford to transmit messages at the low and uniform charge of one shilling, it is not difficult to understand that they have good and obvious reasons for not doing so; the truth being that the present Telegraph Companies are, financially speaking, much in the same condition as the majority of railway companies, having to pay a dividend on a large proportion of capital, which have been irrecoverably sunk, and nothing to show for it.

In addition to this there is another great evil analogous to the railway system, and that is, that the profits on the main trunk line, which in spite of large amounts of lost

capital are still enormous, are swallowed up by a large number of branch lines and stations which do not pay at all ; and, consequently, the present high tariff only suffices to pay a fair dividend of some 7 per cent. on the whole line.

If, therefore, these Companies, with their enormous amount of lost capital and large number of non-paying stations, which cannot be given up, owing to agreements with railway and other companies, cannot afford to reduce their tariff for messages, it is difficult to conceive there can be any just cause or impediment why another company, possessing none of these attributes, should not carry out a system of cheap Telegraphy, and that the public should not be benefited thereby. And another question, no doubt, here arises : is a shilling a sufficient charge, to pay for the receipt, transmission, and delivery of a message, together with all other costs and charges, and yet leave such a surplus as to pay a handsome dividend to those investing in the undertaking? It must be borne in mind that the cost of transmission, receipt, and delivery of a telegraph message is exactly the same, whether it be from London to Uxbridge or London to Glasgow, and this is the peculiarity of Telegraphs as against railways. Every train that runs from London to Liverpool involves a certain amount of wear and tear absolutely unavoidable. Running trains mean consumption of coal, coke, and oil ; wear and tear of engines and rolling stock ; renewal of rails ; and numerous other matters, all of them heavy items of expenditure, while the transmission of ten thousand messages along a line of Telegraph wires has no more effect upon the line itself than if the line had not been used at all. The cost of maintenance for a line of Telegraph is not owing in the slightest degree to the transmission of messages, but to the influence of the

weather upon the materials used in the construction of the line; and, therefore, if there is any difference in cost to a company for the transmission of a message from London to Uxbridge as against London to Glasgow, it can only be alleged as due to the larger capital invested in carrying the line to Glasgow in the first instance, as also the maintenance of a greater number of miles of line. And this is just the argument put forth by the present Companies, for the purpose of showing the impossibility of a uniform rate of charge, and there is something exceedingly plausible on the face of it, for although the mere cost of transmission is the same between the two places, still the line in the one direction is thirty times more than the other, and consequently, cost thirty times more in maintenance; still it is only necessary to look into this to see the utter fallacy of such arguments.

If two lines were constructed, the one from London to Uxbridge, and the other from London to Glasgow *only*, then the argument would hold good; but it has to be remembered that Glasgow is only the last link in a very long chain; the cost of connecting Glasgow to London can only be as the distance between Glasgow and the nearest station south. It may be quite true that Glasgow is at thirty times greater distance from London than Uxbridge, but then there are thirty stations intervening, and each of these stations bears that proportion of the total cost of the line. Suppose the line to Glasgow from London ran through Edinburgh, and there were no intervening stations between Edinburgh and Glasgow, then the cost of connecting Glasgow to London would be as the distance between Glasgow and Edinburgh; and again, the cost of connecting Edinburgh to London would be as the distance between that station and the

nearest station south, and so down through every station to London, and so in regard to the maintenance of the line. It is quite true that the cost of a direct wire from London to Glasgow would cost more than one to Uxbridge, but direct wires are only carried where there is an immense traffic, and as the cost of a distinct direct wire is comparatively trifling, it is far more than counterbalanced by the increased traffic which causes the necessity for it. It would also be absurd to charge the maintenance of 400 miles of line on the message to Glasgow. All messages that go to the stations between London and Glasgow, bear a fair and equal proportion of the cost of the maintenance of the line. These facts are important not only as to the uniformity of charge, but also as to rate of tariff. The present Companies are willing to send a message within a circuit of fifty miles for eighteen-pence, but require four shillings for a message to Liverpool or Manchester; and the reason alleged is that of greater distance; but if, as we have shown, the cost of transmission and delivery be the same for a circuit of fifty miles as for two hundred, and the cost of erection and maintenance in the longer line have to be divided amongst a greater number of stations, then there can be no earthly reason why the charge for the two hundred miles should be more than the fifty miles circuit, except the true reason, which of course they do not allege, and that is of making the long line pay enormously to make up for those which do not pay at all, and thus pay a dividend on their lost capitals; it is a sort of practice which answers most admirably with a railway who need apprehend no competition, and has also with the Telegraph Companies up to the present time, who have so far avoided competition by having agreed to charge the same rate of tariff; but as the public

have had to suffer by this arrangement, it may eventually prove that by so doing, they have been gradually killing the goose which has laid them the golden eggs.

But still the question remains, is a uniform rate of charge of one shilling, sufficient to prove remunerative? or in other words, will it pay? As I have said before, the actual cost of a receipt of a message, its transmission and delivery, is the same in all cases, whether the distance is great or small, and the cost of this will be amply covered by fourpence (4d.) per message; to this must be added the cost of the maintenance of lines. As no wear or tear of the lines can be caused by the transmission of messages, it is due therefore entirely to the action of the weather, on the materials of which the lines are constructed.

If Telegraph poles could be made of some material and erected, as neither to decay, or be blown down in a gale of wind; if the insulators could be made of a material not brittle, which should neither be broken by stone, or by the contraction and expansion of the wire from the variations of temperature, and the wire be so suspended as to allow for any contraction which may take place during frost, without breakage, the cost of maintenance would be reduced to a minimum, in fact little or nothing at all; and yet these things are all, not only within the control of competent engineers but perfectly feasible; it is quite possible so to prepare timber as that it shall not decay; it is possible so to fix the poles in the ground and stay them, as that to be blown down will be out of the range of probabilities; a material has been discovered for an insulator which while better insulation is obtained than on the present lines, cannot be broken by malicious persons, or by the contraction and expansion of the wire, and the wire itself can be so suspended as that its contraction owing to frost,

shall be calculated and allowed for. These are the result of the experience, which has been gained during the past fifteen years. The present Company are adopting them on their own lines, but such adoption means almost an entire reconstruction of their lines, and this is the reason why the large sum of £29,000 was expended by one Telegraph company alone, during the last half-year for repairs on the lines, and these repairs will come equally heavy each half-year, until the whole of these lines are entirely reconstructed.

It is in these points where a company formed for carrying out a system of cheap Telegraphs at a uniform rate have such an immense advantage; they have no millstone round their necks in the shape of lost capital; no drag on their revenues in the shape of a number of stations which do not pay working expenses, and eat up the profits on other lines that do pay well; no defective lines to require annually large sums for maintenance to put them right, and the certainty that with those which are now right it is only a question of time as to their going defective; but they start the race clear and free; with every shilling of capital expended, productive of a good return; with lines constructed in a permanent manner; and, while giving the public the great boon of cheap Telegraphy, at a low and uniform rate of charge of one shilling, will be doing it at a rate of tariff exceedingly profitable to themselves, it would be very difficult to form any estimate of the immense increase in the number of messages which will arise from such a reduction in the cost of Telegrams; the greatest enemies to the reduced rate admit it will be enormous.

It is satisfactory to know that a Company has been established for carrying out this most desirable object, under the name of "The United Kingdom Electric Telegraph

Company (Limited).” It proposes, in accordance with its title, to complete a system of telegraphic communication throughout the whole of Great Britain and Ireland, transmitting messages for the public at the low and uniform charge of one shilling. Its lines are partially constructed, and are being rapidly pushed forward in every direction, and we hope soon to have the satisfaction of seeing a system of cheap telegraphy fully carried out. This has not been accomplished without great difficulty. Monopolists are no lovers of competition, and therefore every conceivable species of annoyance and opposition has been resorted to in the futile endeavour to stop the progress of this great national undertaking, with just as much effect as Mrs. Partington’s celebrated attempt to sweep back with her broom the waves of the Atlantic. Debarred from carrying its lines along the Railways by the exclusive monopoly held by the old Electric and International and Magnetic Telegraph Companies, and in the absence of any Parliamentary powers to carry overground wires on public roads, there were but two courses open to adopt—either to carry its lines under ground, which would inevitably have been fatal to a system of cheap telegraphy, or to wait until these Parliamentary powers had been obtained. This apparently insurmountable difficulty to the immediate formation of cheap telegraphy was at once solved by a plan, originated and carried out by Mr. Robinson, the Engineer of the Company, by which the main trunk lines are carried along the banks of the Canals. From some fortuitous chance or other, this means of establishing a line of telegraph had been entirely overlooked by these monopolists.

Fondly dreaming that this Company would be compelled either to carry its wires underground or not at all,

they awoke to see its lines in active progress; and this was not all, the greatest interest was excited amongst all classes of the community in favour of this project, the authorities in all the large cities and towns of the United Kingdom at once granted every facility to carry these lines in their district, and in some cases where the canals were not available, the trustees of the public roads nobly came forward to offer every facility to the carrying of these lines.

The consequence has been that some eight months have been saved, and the Company are now seeking those powers from Parliament necessary for the better security and extension of its lines, and are supported in their application by the unanimous approval of the whole of the commercial trading and non-trading classes of the community.

The monopolists are again in full force. It is not difficult to understand that *they* cannot see the necessity for the public receiving for one shilling what they are now charging four shillings, and in the case of Irish messages as much as seven shillings and sixpence; they seem to consider it a most laudable matter that the public should continue to pay more than four times as much per telegram as any other country in Europe. Why a telegram should be one franc in Belgium, and Switzerland, and we pay four shillings, is a subject for discussion they most carefully avoid.

It may be confidently anticipated that Parliament will take a far different and wider view of the matter, and that the monopoly held by these Companies of Telegraphic Communication, by which the public suffer, and the business of the country is impeded, will soon come to be regarded as one of those things which have been.

By the skill and ingenuity of man, the electricity which pervades everything, and everywhere the air we breathe, the

earth we walk upon, the food we eat, and the water we drink, has been brought within practical bounds; it can be measured, and weighed even to the thousandth part of a grain; we can obtain from it a light almost rivalling the sun in its brilliancy; we can obtain from it power sufficient to work the most ponderous machinery; and, above all, by its agency time and space have become annihilated, and we are able to have instant communication even with the most uttermost parts of the earth; but this can only be a blessing where it can be enjoyed; and one important element has still been wanting to make the Telegraph for the many as well as the few, that is—cheapness. This is now being carried out.

Telegrams for the million means a great impetus to trade and commerce; it's a further connecting link in the great bond of civilization, creating a kindlier feeling amongst all classes; it means making the Telegraph part of our every day system, in private as well as in business matters, and will thus bring it within the reach of those who have hitherto been debarred from the use of it by the high rate of charges; it means making that which was sent by the great Creator to be a blessing to mankind, alike open to both rich and poor; it means all this and a vast deal more. One thing is certain, "TELEGRAMS FOR THE MILLIONS" means "MILLIONS OF TELEGRAMS."